

How to prevent rotator cuff injuries

Medically reviewed by [Gregory Minnis, DPT](#) — Written by [Jenna Fletcher](#) on February 13, 2019

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The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint that connects the upper arm bone to the shoulder blade. Four muscles attach to the bones of the shoulder joint, and these form the rotator cuff. Performing certain rotator cuff exercises can help prevent injury to this part of the body.

The rotator cuff has many functions. The muscles do the following:

- center the upper arm bone in the socket of the shoulder joint and hold it there
- power arm and shoulder movements

The shoulder is the most mobile joint in the body. It is possible to misuse or overuse the joint, which makes it very easy to injure the rotator cuff and other parts of the shoulder.

People can help prevent injuries by doing exercises to keep the rotator cuff muscles strong and flexible.

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Rotator cuff injuries



Some sports, such as tennis or baseball, can cause rotator cuff injuries.

Most rotator cuff injuries are overuse injuries from repetitive overhead motions.

People who are prone to rotator cuff injuries include athletes who play baseball or tennis and people with jobs, such as house painting or construction, that require repetitive overhead motions.

Rotator cuff overuse often leads to rotator cuff impingement, which is the pinching of one of the rotator cuff tendons, or other soft tissue, that runs through the space between the upper arm bone, or humerus, and the shoulder blade, or scapula.

Impingement can occur when muscle strain and other overuse injuries cause swelling in the shoulder joint, decreasing the space between these bones.

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People may sometimes tear one of the tendons or muscles in the rotator cuff, although this is less common than overuse injuries. Rotator cuff tears may be very painful, but most of the time, they will heal with rest and strengthening exercises.

According to the [American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons](#), following a conditioning program helps a person return to daily activities in addition to any sports and other recreational activities that they were participating in before the injury.

Rotator cuff exercises

The following rotator cuff exercises and stretches can help increase strength and flexibility.

Arm reach



To do an arm reach, a person should do the following:

1. Lie flat on the back, extend the arms and legs, and engage the

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3. Like starting a lawnmower, pull the elbow of the arm with the weight back across the body.
4. Return slowly to the start position.
5. Repeat, working up to 2–3 sets of 8–10 repetitions.
6. Repeat on the other side.

Doorway stretch

Follow the steps below to do this stretch:

1. Stand in a doorway, holding both sides of the frame at or just below shoulder height.
2. Lean forward gently, keeping the back straight until there is a light stretch in the front of the shoulders.
3. Lean further forward to intensify the stretch if necessary. It should not feel at all painful.
4. Return to a standing position.

Two arm wall stretch

People can perform this stretch by doing the following:

1. Stand up straight with the back against a wall.
2. Raise each arm sideways into an L-shape with the upper arm parallel to the floor, keeping the arms as flat against the wall as possible.
3. Maintaining the elbow bend, move the arms up the wall to bring the hands closer together and then move them back down.
4. Return to a resting position.

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When to see a doctor

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A person who experiences ongoing pain or swelling of the shoulder should speak to a doctor.

People who experience any of the following symptoms in the shoulder should make an appointment to see a doctor as they may have a rotator cuff injury:

- pain, especially pain that does not improve with rest
- swelling
- redness or tenderness around the joint

For more severe rotator cuff injuries, a person may need emergency medical attention.

It is essential to seek immediate medical care if any of the following symptoms occur:

- sudden, severe pain
- visible joint deformity
- inability to use the shoulder joint
- sudden swelling

Takeaway ADVERTISEMENT



The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles in the shoulder. As the shoulder joint is so mobile and people use it so frequently, it is very easy to injure the rotator cuff.

People who find themselves with rotator cuff injuries or pain may want to use the simple exercises above to strengthen this part of the body and increase its flexibility.

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2. Reach one arm toward the ceiling, lifting it until the shoulder blade comes off the floor.
3. Hold for 5 seconds.
4. Return arm to the floor.
5. Repeat on the other side.

Lying down external rotation

Sidelying Shoulder External Rotation with Dumbbell Exercise



A person can follow these steps to do this exercise:

1. Lie on the side of the body on a firm surface, holding a light weight in the upper hand.
2. Bend the top elbow to 90 degrees, keeping the upper arm against the side of the body and letting the weighted hand rest toward the floor in front of the body.
3. Keeping the elbow against the side of the body, rotate the arm at the shoulder, bringing the weight toward the ceiling.
4. Slowly lower the weighted arm back to the starting position.
5. Repeat on the other side of the body.
6. Place a small towel roll in the armpit while doing this exercise to

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Pendulum

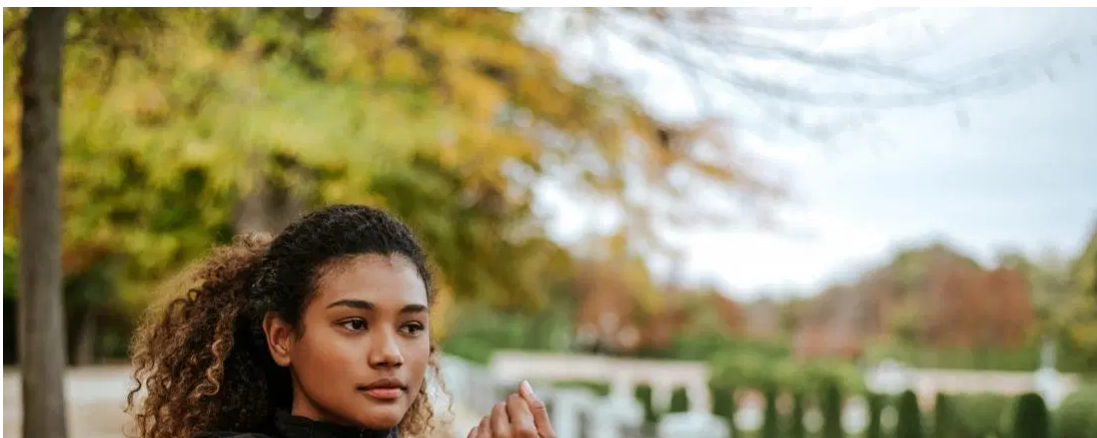
How to do a pendulum exercise



The pendulum exercise involves the steps below:

1. Lean forward with one arm hanging freely. Use the other arm to brace against a chair for support.
2. Gently swing the hanging arm from side to side, forward and back, and in a circular motion.
3. Slowly return to a standing position.
4. Repeat on the other side.

Crossover arm stretch



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The crossover arm stretch involves the steps below:

1. Lift one arm so that it is perpendicular to the floor and extend it straight without locking it.
2. Take the wrist of the extended, lifted arm with the opposite hand.
3. Gently pull the arm across the front of the body, trying to hug the chest with the arm.
4. Hold the stretch for 5 seconds before slowly releasing it.
5. Repeat on the other side.

Lawnmower

How To Do A SINGLE ARM DUMBBELL LAWNMOWER RO...



To do a lawnmower pull, a person should:

1. Place one foot slightly forward so that the feet are shoulder-width apart and hold a light weight in one hand.
2. Keep the hand that is not holding the weight on the hip, lean slightly

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